

**INT. EMIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Gnarled hands. A film strip. An ancient projector whirs.

MALE VOICEOVER

Population decline and the Resource  
War bankrupted most governments.  
Corporations bought entire urban  
swaths at bargain basement prices.

The Corps reconstituted city-states  
as Metros, providing water, safety,  
and all the iNet a Hume could want.

YOUNG ARY (8), wears iNet glasses. EMIL (70) removes them.  
Young Ary's blinded by the bright, colorful film.

MALE VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

The Hub has three tenets: Safety  
requires honesty. Freedom compels  
productivity. Comfort demands  
compliance. Most citizens follow  
the rules. A few... refuse.

Ary's eyes fill with tears. They're in love. They blink.

**INT. BOMBED-OUT GYMNASIUM - NIGHT**

ARY (23), blinks into a sparking DVD player. They argue with  
CAL (24) as a dozen would-be audience members heckle them.

CAL

That's all malfunction. Here --

ARY

Get unplugged, divZero.

AUDIENCE 1

Oy, we offline? Where's the show?

AUDIENCE 2

Mute, cizzie. Keep it lo-vol.

A puff of smoke, a pop. Music blares through old boom boxes,  
a bluetooth canister, a funnel taped to computer speakers.

Star Wars, Episode 4: A New Hope.

The crowd is stunned by John Williams's symphonic genius.

Ary stands back. They frame the audience's reaction between  
their index fingers and thumbs, a director getting their  
perfect shot.

**EXT. GYMNASIUM**

From a distance, a SURVEILLANCE BOT twitches to life. A microphone emerges, stretches, faintly picks up the sound.

White screen. AUDIO ERROR: FILE NOT FOUND. Contraband.

SURVEILLANCE BOT  
Backup requested.

**INT. GYMNASIUM**

The opening crawl is nearly done. AUDIENCE 1 mouths the words to himself. AUDIENCE 2 reads the words aloud to a YOUNG BOY.

The Star Destroyer comes on the screen. People gasp.

YOUNG BOY  
Is it real?

AUDIENCE 2  
No, it's a movie.

In the open sky above them, the CorpsCorps strike.

The FOOTSOLDIERS are matte black metal Bots, their faces blank, except for a grille where a mouth should be. Their eyes are night-vision camera lenses. They carry laser rifles.

Spotlights. Screams. Humans scatter. The Bots give chase.

Ary tries to take the DVD, the projector, anything.

CAL  
Ary! X-out! Now!

ARY  
But the tech --

CAL  
Roze, go ahead and die!

He takes off. Ary gives up and runs, too.

**INT. UNDERGROUND TUNNELS - CONTINUOUS**

A tunnel. Ary clicks a button. An explosion. The ceiling caves in, sealing it off. Cal goes left, Ary goes right.

Dirt walls. Flickering LED lights. Dull, distant thuds. The ceiling rains dust. Ary pants. Their pulse thunders.

**EXT. HUB STREET**

A vent in the ground. Ary emerges. Lights in the distance. An armored truck rolls nearby. Ary doesn't stick around.

**EXT. HUB ALLEY**

Ary jumps a fence, searching for safe haven.

A tiny *squeak*. It's a CUTE BOT. Bespoke, wide eyed.

ARY  
Where in the flux... ?

Cute Bot rolls to an ajar door, squeezes inside. Ary follows.

**INT. APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY**

A SECUROBOT guards the elevators. Ary takes the stairs.

**INT. APARTMENT BUILDING STAIRWELL**

The stairs end. Ary looks around in vain.

ARY  
Kak.

There's only one door. Slightly open. Electric purple light pours through the crack.

Cute Bot goes inside. The light stops. Ary panics. No escape.

The door flies open.

ZIA (25) wields a blowtorch. Her coverall pants have grease stains and her cuffs are covered in calculations.

She flips up her face shield, squints at Ary.

ARY (CONT'D)  
Please. Hide me. I'm begging.

ZIA  
Noted.

A *thud* from downstairs.

ARY  
Don't let me die today.

Zia stands back. Ary scurries inside.

**INT. ZIA'S WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS**

Bots. Every shape, size, color, function.

They whirl between tables, hang from the walls and ceiling.  
One welds, one 3D-prints, another paints, a fourth cleans.

Large windows run along one side of the room. Ary can see the  
CorpsCorps raid, nearly peaceful from so far away.

ZIA  
Safety requires honesty.

Ary's attention snaps back to their would-be savior.

ARY  
Error message?

ZIA  
They're after you, right?

She jerks her chin toward the windows. Ary nods.

ZIA (CONT'D)  
You're a criminal.

ARY  
I'm an artist.

ZIA  
Audio replay. A what?

ARY  
An artist. Film, mostly, but I've  
done some writing. Even painted a  
bit, when I was younger.

Zia's eyes flash purple. Her iNet lenses look up the words  
"artist," "film," "paint." VOCABULARY ERROR. FILE NOT FOUND.

ZIA  
Your narrative cannot be confirmed.

ARY  
You doing a pubSearch? Must want  
the CorpsCorps to pay you a visit.

ZIA  
I have a private iNet lookUp.

Ary whistles in acknowledgement of the privilege.

ARY

Oh, you *fancy*. Try a search for "creativity," or "critical thinking." Oooh, how about "civil disobedience?" That's a good one.

Zia's lenses flash. Error, error, error. FILE NOT FOUND.

ZIA

Art is illegal. You're a criminal.

ARY

Only if you agree it's a crime.

ZIA

You lied to me. You're a liar.

ARY

I'm a lot of things. But no liar.

ZIA

You know more than the iNet? How is that possible?

ARY

Blu-check. Someone's lying to you. But it ain't me.

Ary meets Zia's gaze in challenge. Neither of them have been this close to anyone in a while.

ZIA

You don't have iNet lenses.

ARY

Mine's glasses.

ZIA

Where are they?

ARY

Whereabouts currently unknown.

ZIA

Lost.

ARY

You could say that.

ZIA

I did say that.

Ary huffs a laugh. Zia steps back and smiles to herself.

ZIA (CONT'D)  
I can't live without it. The iNet.

ARY  
Bit of a Bot yourself, eh?

ZIA  
No. Human. Just like you.

ARY  
An artist, too. Just like me.

ZIA  
Elaborate.

Ary waves at the worktable, the works-in-progress.

ARY  
See it in your mind, bring it to  
life. Something from nothing. Art.

ZIA  
Science, not art.

Outside, the CorpsCorps operation disperses.

ARY  
I should go.

Zia frowns. Ary notices.

ARY (CONT'D)  
I could come back, sometime.

ZIA  
Why?

ARY  
Never mind, then.

ZIA  
Wait. You... may return.

ARY  
Spizzy. Thanks. I guess.

A beat.

ZIA  
I haven't talked to a human in  
three weeks.

ARY  
Oh.

ZIA  
Oh.

ARY  
One one?

ZIA  
What?

ARY  
Figured you'd slipped into binary.

Zia frowns even more deeply.

ARY (CONT'D)  
Since you're part Bot, and all.

ZIA  
Oh. This is... comedy.

ARY  
It's comedy alright. From one Bot  
to another --  
(Terminator voice)  
Hasta la vista, baby.

They leave. Zia stares at the door.

#### **EXT. HUB STREET - NIGHT**

Ary scuttles home through streets and alleys.

Searchlights sweep the area, but they don't point in Ary's direction.

#### **INT. ARY'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING**

A weak dawn shines through the window.

A FLOORSWEEP, a small vacuum Bot, dings to life as it emerges from a hatch. It vacuums the carpet, avoiding books and papers that litter the floor.

The Bot drives by the coffee table. Ary's iNet glasses flash underneath, from where they've been "misplaced."

#### **INT. ARY'S BEDROOM**

The Bot goes into the bedroom where Ary's asleep. A knock at the front door has them opening their eyes.

**INT. ARY'S ENTRYWAY**

Ary looks through a securoFeed monitor, then opens the door. Their father, BECK (55) enters, embraces them in relief.

ARY  
Good morning?

BECK  
You didn't answer my nMessages or  
vidChats--

ARY  
I was asleep.

BECK  
So I called Cal. He told me you  
were dead.

ARY  
The flux? What is his malfunction?

BECK  
Last night. Was that you?

Ary doesn't answer.

BECK (CONT'D)  
Tell me why it's worth dying for.

ARY  
The Corp won't stop me from doing  
what I love.

BECK  
You want to end up like him.

ARY  
At least Grandpa died happy.

BECK  
I'd rather have you alive.

ARY  
If you can call it living.

BECK  
Not this again.

ARY  
Yes! Again! The Corp has to --

BECK  
Quiet. They're listening.



ARY  
Maybe they should hear.

They glare at each other. A notif goes off on Beck's iNet.

BECK  
I have work, but please. Visit me  
sometime. Anytime.

Ary shrugs. Beck is hurt. He sighs in resignation, leaves.

**INT. ARY'S LIVING ROOM**

The iNet glasses. Ary, in gray Hub clothes, grabs them.

**EXT. HUB STREET - DAY**

The Hub is a palette of greys, offwhites, beiges. Buildings are uniform, architectural details sanded off or pasted over.

Walls are blank, until Humes walk by and activate them with iNet lenses. Then ads cover the surfaces: the latest Streamedy; Readys (instant meals); the newest bopBot adJing.

Ary rips their glasses off in disgust. They turn a corner.

A CORPSCORPS FOOT SOLDIER has a male CITIZEN (54) pinned on the sidewalk. ANOTHER CORPSCORPS stands next to the citizen's female PARTNER (54), who stares out at the street.

Ary catches her eye. The woman doesn't even blink.

Ary looks away, crosses the street, keeps walking.

**EXT. CAL'S LOFT**

Cal answers the door in a blanket.

ARY  
Why did you tell my dad I was dead?

CAL  
I was asleep. He woke me up.

He walks inside. Ary follows.

**INT. CAL'S LOFT - CONTINUOUS**

Illegal art is everywhere. A stack of paintings leans against a wall, plasticine crates overflow with sculptures, pottery.

ARY  
How many did we lose?

In the kitchen area, Cal makes himself a cup of cof.

CAL  
Since you're actually alive, just  
one. Geen.

ARY  
Flux.

Cal lounges on the couch. His smartMug dings as it keeps the  
cof at a perfect temperature.

CAL  
He wasn't throwing the party. He'll  
only get reeducation.

Ary goes into the kitchen, pushes a button on the cof  
machine. It spits a mixture into a second smartMug.

ARY  
Yeah. "Only." How'd they find us?

CAL  
I checked my surveillance loops. We  
were invisible. Audio got flagged.

On their way over to the couch, Ary looks through the crates.  
They admire a sculpture made of melted metal and plastic.

CAL (CONT'D)  
Picked that up from Lange. Before  
he was snatched last week.

ARY  
Didn't know he got Corpsd.

CAL  
Charged my buyer extra, since  
Lange's not gonna make any more.

Ary scowls at him in disgust.

CAL (CONT'D)  
What? It's true.

Ary looks back at the things in the box.

ARY  
What's this?

They put down their cof and pick out a blocky piece of equipment. Is that a lens? A microphone?

ARY (CONT'D)  
Holy shit, a camera.

CAL  
Don't get sparkle-eyes. Did what I could, but that kak's deFunct.

He stretches languidly.

CAL (CONT'D)  
And if I can't fix it, no one can.

#### **EXT. ZIA'S WORKSHOP - MORNING**

Ary's on the stoop, wearing an adCorp-branded backpack. Zia blinks at them.

ZIA  
You're here.

ARY  
See. Not a liar. Can I come in?

#### **INT. ZIA'S WORKSHOP**

The Bots are all hard at work, same as the night before. Ary tears their attention away from the engrossing scene.

ARY  
I got a req.

They pull out the camcorder from their bag.

ARY (CONT'D)  
Can you fix this?

ZIA  
A rudimentary vidStream device.

Zia pokes at it, attempts to pry open the VHS cassette tray.

ZIA (CONT'D)  
Needs power, before I can --

ARY  
Already hard at work. Operational in no time, I can tell.